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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ABUJA 000344

SIPDIS

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TAGS: PREL PTER EPET NI IZ

SUBJECT: NIGERIA: OBASANJO ON IRAQ, TERRORISM AND OIL

CLASSIFIED BY AMBASSADOR HOWARD F. JETER. REASON 1.5(b).

¶1. (C) Summary: President Obasanjo February 13 publicly called for Iraq to disarm peacefully, noting that the US could not be expected to stand down its forces otherwise. Recalling South Africa's decision to give up WMD programs, Obasanjo repeated these points during a private meeting with Ambassador Jeter and DAS Bridgewater the following day. Nigeria's President thought the GON could limit and contain any violent domestic reaction to US military action in Iraq. Oil production could rise to 2.8 MBD if necessary, Obasanjo said. End Summary.

IRAQ MUST DISARM PEACEFULLY OR EXPECT WAR

¶2. (U) Responding to media reports of discovery of prohibited Iraqi ballistic missiles, Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo February 13 told reporters Iraq must comply with UNSCR 1441 or risk war. Disarming nations of weapons of mass destruction was a concern of all nations, not just the U.S. It should not be expected that the U.S., with over 200,000 troops in the Gulf region, would stand down its forces without a strong justification.

¶3. (C) Meeting with Ambassador Jeter and AF DAS Bridgewater at his residence February 14, Obasanjo reiterated his public message. He added that South Africa's earlier disarmament offered Iraq a roadmap.

THE WAR AGAINST TERROR IS "A FIGHT FOR ALL OF US"

¶4. (C) Commenting on critics of U.S. policy, Obasanjo said he saw the U.S. as a country that had thought itself impregnable now forced to defend itself. The war against terror, he went on, is a fight for all of us. The UNSC must, however, be the instrument.

GON PROBABLY CAN CONTROL DOMESTIC FUNDAMENTALISTS

¶5. (C) Taking note of Ambassador Bridgewater's expression of appreciation for Nigeria's support for the war on terrorism, Obasanjo remarked that Nigeria had to strike a balance among the interests of various groups. Of particular concern to the GON were Christian and Muslim fundamentalists. In response to Ambassador Jeter's question, Obasanjo said the GON was working to assess the likely internal impact of U.S. military action in Iraq. The point was being made repeatedly and at all levels that the problems with Iraq were political, not religious. He thought that the GON could "control [its] own fundamentalists internally." Otherwise, "I don't see anything [coming], but I cannot predict [the future]."

OIL PRODUCTION SURGE TO 2.8 MBD POSSIBLE

¶6. (C) Obasanjo offered that Nigeria could raise its oil production to 2.8, possibly 2.9, MBD if the need arose. "We are talking to the oil companies about that," he added.

COMMENT

17. (C) The GON was caught off-guard by the violent protests surrounding the Miss World pageant last year. Since that time, GON security organizations have nipped several nascent protests in the bud, in Abuja and elsewhere. U.S. military action in Iraq would present a new level of challenge, and protests, some of them probably violent, would likely take place in several Nigerian cities. We are pleased to note that Obasanjo believes domestic fundamentalists can be contained. Moreover, the GON's response to the most recent threats of anti-American protests has been strong. We do not anticipate a strong GON response to U.S. military action. Depending on circumstances (e.g., what the inspectors find in coming days, pronouncements by other governments, and, above all, civilian casualties), we can anticipate a response ranging from tacit support to not-very-vocal opposition. The GON will emphasize that the dispute with Iraq is political and not religious. It already is employing Muslim Ministers to deliver that point to target audiences. We believe this and other efforts will help mitigate violent manifestations of disagreement with U.S. actions. All the same, we are examining our security posture and considering what unilateral steps the Embassy and Consulate General can take to enhance security. We are also pleased to learn of GON willingness to surge oil production in the event of conflict. However, we cannot at this time verify surge capacity.

18. (U) Ambassador Bridgewater cleared this message.

JETER